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THE ARTISTIC ASPECTS OF BELLAMY'S "LOOKING BACKWARD."

BY HENRY HOLIDAY.



MUST assume that my readers have read "Looking Backward," that it has inspired a large majority with the enthusiasm of hope, and, may I not add, with the determination yourselves to assist in promoting the fulfilment of that hope; but my experience leads me also to believe that with some of you that hope is qualified by misgivings as to the practicability of our author's scheme, that to others the state of society represented is not in itself attractive, though preferable to that of the present day, with its terrible proportion of destitution, misery, disease and crime, and finally, that a very small, I might say a negligible proportion, object to the scheme altogether, as neither practicable nor desirable.

In the first place the principles on which Mr. Bellamy's scheme is based, are not new. This is evident from the passages cited from Mill, which occur in an examination of the systems of St. Simon, Fourier, and others. Those who have heard any of the Fabian lectures will know how the able members of that society have been advocating similar principles for years. To those who have not read these essays, I earnestly commend their careful study. They are especially instructive where they deal with that aspect of the subject now before us.

COZENING AS A FINE ART.

Among human beings, a society subsisting by a healthy and worthy spirit of emulation, will inevitably develop and perpetuate the qualities best fitted for success under such wholesome conditions; while a society, subsisting by profit, by giving the least and getting the most in every transaction, will, with equal certainty, develop and perpetuate all those qualities fitted for success in a hostile struggle based upon pure selfishness. Greed, a sharp eye for one's neighbors weak point, an unswerving determination to take advantage of that weakness, a fertility of resource in making the worthless appear valuable, when selling, and in depreciating what is good when buying, these and all the other requisites for piling up profits have made Cozening the one conspicuous Fine Art of the nineteenth century, by virtue of that principle of natural selection, which, in an environment of slime, develops the crawling and creeping things fittest to thrive in it.

REPULSIVE STREET ARCHITECTURE.

A glance at our streets is sufficient to show how depraved our taste has become. I am now considering not so much artistic taste as practical domestic and social tastes, though here again there is no real line of demarcation between these and art. Simplicity, as Mr. Bellamy shows, must be the result of a system which, by removing the tyranny of snobbery and

the silly desire to do what everybody else does, for fear of losing social status, sets us free to do what we please, enables us to get a thing because it suits our individual tastes, and not because our class of society expects us to get it. Liberated from this servitude, there is no more chance of a man surrounding himself with useless superfluities, which give much trouble and little pleasure, than there is of a mollusc surrounding itself with a shell larger than it can manage. The mollusc knows better than to be such a fool, and under a rational system, perhaps even man may attain to the wisdom of the mollusc.

But there is an important complement to this simplicity of private life, which all the freedom from care and worry which it involves, and all the genuine enjoyment for which it provides, and all the picturesque variety of social life and its surroundings which must follow when each individual is absolutely free to develop and give expression to his own personal tastes. That other important aspect of the subject is the simultaneous development of splendor in public life.

The growth of the spirit of brotherhood would give infinitely greater zest to the carrying out of great public works than can exist under the present struggle for life.

There would be a prospect then for a revival of that spirit which produced the Parthenon, and the great middle-age cathedrals; but this point brings me so near the question of art proper, that it will rather tend to simplification than to confusion if I take this up now without dropping those questions of taste and habit with which it is so closely allied.

Let us first inquire into the cause of the almost total absence of art in our present life. It is admitted on all hands. It is a matter of constant discussion. There are many clever, and some noble works of art produced still, that is to say, there are still men who, having made art their profession from a genuine impulse, produce works which possess beauty, and sometimes noble thought, but outside these isolated cases, where is the art in our daily life, in the art in our houses, in our furniture, in our dress, in all our utensils, and in nineteen-twentieths of our pictures, and statues, and buildings? Whence arises that deadly uniformity, that depressing all-prevailing grayness—but that is too flattering a term—that all-prevailing dinginess which fills our life, so far as its external conditions are concerned, and has filled in

throughout this century? Here and there a few educated persons are cultivating taste in form and color as an exotic, but as a spontaneous growth it is gone. Whether we look at the earlier, middle, or later years of the century we find the same thing. If we walk through our older or more recent streets, with some scattered exceptions, we look in vain for a gleam of taste, for a glimpse of anything that can charm the eye, or refresh the mind.

Interminable rows of identical houses, all cut down to one common type, or a babel of discordant and incongruous styles. Slaves in chains must have built them, nothing else can account for the gloom which they betray and produce.

Ornament there is, ghastly ornament, all done to order under heavy penalties, all alike, all representing—what?—the pleasure of the worker in fashioning it? Good heavens, no, it is done by machinery. It represents what is expected of the



class of society to which the owners of the houses belong, or wish to be thought to belong.

WHERE DO ART AND BEAUTY COME IN?

This is of course the question, and if I believed love of beauty to be an acquired artificial taste, I should have great hesitation in answering it; but, I am quite confident, that beauty is not an acquired taste.

It is, in my opinion, an absolutely essential part of our nature; it may, by disease, be distorted into love of finery; it may be stunted and suppressed and crowded out with engrossing cares and anxieties, till it is hardly, if at all, perceptible; but to say that human beings naturally prefer ugliness to beauty, would be as rational as to say that they prefer pain and sickness to health, misery to happiness.

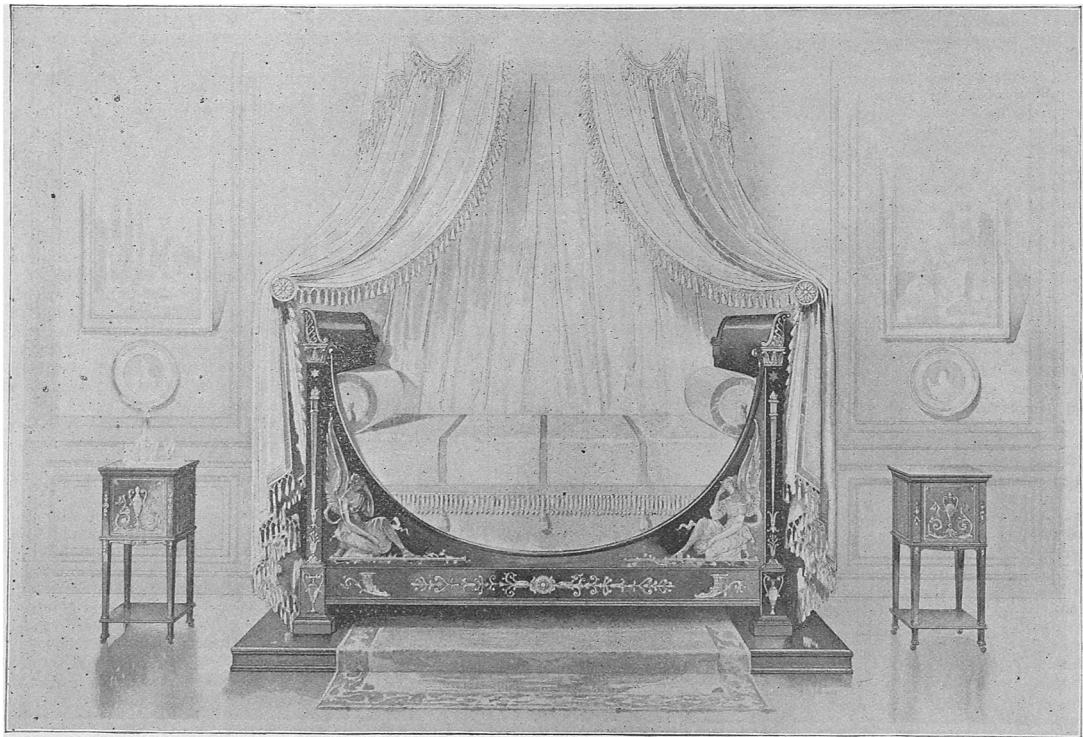
That quick response of our sentient nature of the great mother Nature is Love of Beauty, and nothing can utterly destroy it, except transportation to another universe.

It has been universal, and is so still, where the foul monsters Profit and Snobbery have not established their corrupting rule.

the great moral, or rather immoral, forces, profit, *i.e.*, the love of money, which is the root of all evil, and snobbery, *i.e.*, the servile imitation of the monied classes, which substitutes finery for beauty. These two, by degrading the higher moral and intellectual faculties, sap the vitals of Art, they poison it at the roots. But there is yet another condition absolutely essential to the healthy growth of Art, namely, leisure to cultivate, and liberty to enjoy, the Love of Beauty. Art is a plant which requires space, fresh air, and light; without these, you may secure the finest stock, you may plant it in the richest soil, but the plant will wither, and the root itself perish in time.

Under the confusion and intensity of the struggle for existence there is no time to think of beauty—men must live, and for the large majority, there is just as much chance of their being able to make life beautiful, in such a fight for existence, as of my being able to paint a picture in the roadway.

Do not suppose that I desire to give Art a place or a prominence that does not belong to it. I regard Art as the blossom, not the root of human life; but if the blossom do not appear, or is deformed, we know that the root is unsound.



BED IN THE EMPIRE STYLE, BY GEORGE REMON.

Remove these. Let men work in comfort, and without sordid cares or corrupting motives, and they will naturally prefer to work well than ill. Add to this the powerful incentive of public esteem, and they will work with zest and vigor.

What people call a routine in Mr. Bellamy's system, is a simple series of inducements, which, by ensuring that each worker gets the full credit of his work, gives him the most powerful incentive to distinguish himself by the excellence of his work, or by the improvements he can effect. The various grades supply an attraction almost absent in our present system to legitimate ambition, while the absence of the vulgar class distinctions of wealth and rank, and the leisure allowed to all, gives opportunity to cultivate, and liberty to enjoy, individual tastes.

These last words remind me that I have scarcely touched on one very potent factor among the conditions which effect the healthy growth of art. So far, we have only considered

Art is, above all things, the offspring of Harmony. It is one expression, by means of harmony in form and in color, in thought and conception, of that human harmony, that Divinity in Humanity, which we call Love.

It is to promote this Divine principle that we are striving. Man has an element in him of self, but he has an element in him also of brotherhood. We believe, that the system under which we live, by compelling men to give a little and get as much as they can in all their transactions, develops the lower and stunts the higher element.

On all hands there is evidence that men are awakening to this great fact, they are beginning to feel that self must suffer, if brotherhood be neglected. A new faith and a new hope are springing up, and uniting men in the noble effort to realize the Kingdom of God on Earth, by substituting a system, based on brotherhood, for one based on self.

A strong faith is needed for such a work.